

Air Force Complaint and Fraud, Waste, and Abuse (FWA) Programs

Introduction

The words “Complaint” and “Fraud, Waste, and Abuse” are sure to stir the strongest of negative feelings. This lesson is not designed to focus on the negative but to accentuate the positive. The positive is that you have an avenue to address what you consider to be “wrongs” against an individual or organization. But remember, there are ways to resolve your problems BEFORE filing complaints with the Inspector General or with Congress. Use your chain of command to resolve your problems. If you still feel your complaint is not resolved, then you have the right to file a formal complaint. Filing complaints aren’t the only way you can change what you feel is not “right.” Your flight training officer will also cover other ways to effect change. Although not all inclusive, one such way is by utilizing the Air Force Suggestion programs. This program allows you to have a direct voice in changing something for the better. By the end of this lesson, you should no longer equate the Air Force Complaint and Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Program with something bad. Rather, you should view them as “positives”--programs designed to give you a voice to correct wrongdoings. Remember, your immediate chain of command is the best place to begin.

Study Assignment

Read information section of this lesson.

Lesson Objective: Know the Air Force Complaint Programs.

Samples of Behavior:

1. State the purpose of Air Force Complaint Programs.
2. State the importance of initially using the chain of command to resolve complaints.
3. Identify the goal of the Fraud, Waste, and Abuse (FWA) Program.
4. State an individual’s responsibility concerning the FWA Program.
5. State other avenues available in the Air Force to effect change.

Information

The Inspector General Program

The Inspector General (IG) Act of 1978 directed that all services establish a function that would act as oversight for its programs and members. At every Air Force base, there is a senior member designated as an IG. The IG is usually the vice commander of the installation. IGs have numerous responsibilities that include

overseeing and inspecting mission capability, operational readiness, and unit effectiveness. IGs are also responsible for managing the complaint program.

Complaint Programs Policy

The Air Force Complaint programs are leadership tools that indicate where command involvement needs to correct systemic, programmatic, or procedural weaknesses. These programs ensure prompt and fair resolution to problems affecting the Air Force mission. They also measure the confidence our people have in Air Force leadership.

These programs provide feedback that is critical to the success of each individual in the supervisory chain. These programs help ensure:

- Air Force personnel are using resources effectively and efficiently in support of the mission.
- Issues are objectively and fairly resolved in an atmosphere of trust without retaliation or the fear of reprisal.
- Management reveals and corrects any false perceptions that Air Force members may hold about goals, plans, and projects.

Personal complaints and FWA disclosures help commanders to discover and correct problems affecting the productivity and satisfaction of assigned personnel. Resolving the underlying cause of a complaint may prevent more severe symptoms or costly effects, such as reduced performance, accidents, poor-quality work, poor morale, or loss of resources. Substantiated allegations may indicate isolated weaknesses or systemic problems that affect resources. Unsubstantiated allegations may indicate that commanders need to inform personnel about programs, projects, procedures, or policies.

AFI 90-301, Inspector General Complaints, formalizes the Air Force's commitment to prevent and eliminate fraud, waste, and abuse and outlines the complaint process. Air Force members have a duty to report mismanagement, FWA, a violation of any Air Force directive, an injustice, deficiency or like condition to a superior or commander in their chain of command, to an inspector or IG, or within any established grievance channel.

Presenting Complaints to Appropriate Officials

An Air Force member should present complaints to the appropriate officials responsible for the area of complaint. Don't use the IG complaint program for matters normally appealed through other channels unless there is evidence that those channels mishandled a complaint (for example, an individual is denied specific rights or there was a breach of established policy or procedure.)

An Air Force member may file an IG complaint at any level without notifying or following the chain of command. But remember, following the chain of command is the best avenue in trying to resolve complaints. Complainants normally do not travel at government expense to present a complaint.

Complainant Protections

The Air Force has a well-established complaint program. You can get help quickly and fairly when you need someone to answer a question. You can make your complaint at any level in the IG system. No one may act against you just because you complained. You have the right to file a protected disclosure without fear of reprisal. If you think someone has acted against you just because you complained, tell an inspector or an IG. IGs will advise you of the option to file a reprisal complaint with the DoD Inspector General according to established procedures.

You may go to an inspector or IG at any level, but experience has shown **commanders and supervisors are the people best equipped to resolve complaints.** Therefore, you are encouraged but not required to discuss your problem with your supervisor or your commander before coming to the IG.

IGs conduct inquiries and investigations at a command level that prevents self-investigation or the perception of the same. When there is any doubt that an impartial inquiry or investigation can be conducted, IGs refer the matter to the next level in the chain of command. The inquiry officer must be impartial, unbiased, and totally objective.

Complaints not Handled in Inspector General (IG) Channels

Matters covered under other directives are generally not handled through the IG channels.

If a policy directive provides specific appeal channels, you must exhaust those appeal procedures. You must be able to allege that there was a procedural problem with the process before using IG channels. Mere dissatisfaction with the outcome of an appeal is not sufficient basis for an IG review, inquiry, or investigation.

Fraud, Waste, and Abuse (FWA)

Every year the Air Force loses millions of dollars in moneys and resources due to individuals abusing the system, wasting precious resources and committing acts of fraud. For example, a captain goes on a temporary tour of duty (TDY) for 2 weeks. The captain finishes the job in 4 days and for the remainder of the time goes to the beach. The vacation the captain took was at government expense. Did the captain commit fraud? Did the captain abuse the system? The captain clearly abused the system by using government time and funds for personal benefit. A good example of fraud is when a contractor knowingly sells the Air Force parts which don't meet the specifications of the contract. You certainly wouldn't want to be in a plane in which the propeller was a substandard part from a contractor. Waste of resources can be anything from throwing away usable items to ordering a \$1,000 part when a \$50 part

does the job. Misuse of grade is normally considered abuse. Consider this example. A senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) in transportation ordered two junior airmen to fix his personal vehicle during duty hours; the airmen follow orders because the senior NCO is the boss. There is no doubt that the senior NCO used his leadership position for personal gain.

Preventing FWA is the primary focus of the program. Detection and prosecution serve to deter fraudulent, wasteful, or abusive practices; however, the key element of the program is preventing the loss of resources. The Inspector General (SAF/IG) is the focal point for preventing FWA in the Air Force. Within the Office of the Inspector General, the Inquiries Division directs, administers, and oversees the Air Force FWA Prevention and Detection Program.

Anyone may report fraud, waste, and abuse (FWA) complaints to the Air Force Audit Agency, Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI), security forces, or other proper authority. You should try resolving FWA issues in command channels before elevating them to a higher level as with personal complaints.

Promptly advise the AFOSI of suspected criminal misconduct or fraud. The AFOSI investigates criminal allegations. You may submit FWA disclosures on an AF Form 635, **USAF Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Disclosure**, by letter, in person, or by FWA hotlines.

You may request to remain confidential or submit the complaint anonymously. The identity of individuals granted confidentiality may be revealed only to Air Force or DoD officials who establish an official need for the information with the express approval of the appointing authority or SAF/IG. In making a disclosure, the individual is responsible for providing factual, unbiased, and specific information. Information contained in a disclosure or complaint is privileged. The release of records relating to FWA and complaint inquiries and investigations outside the Air Force or to a person who does not have an official need to know is prohibited without the approval of SAF/IG or the designated representative.

Individuals making a disclosure may request a summary of the results from the office to which the disclosure is made. This request must be made at the same time the disclosure is submitted. The nature of the allegation, findings, and corrective actions will determine what information is releasable. All information released must be according to the Privacy Act of 1974 and the Freedom of Information Act. Anonymous disclosures are investigated and processed in the same manner as all other complaints and disclosures. However, feedback information will not be provided to inquiring individuals, including any individual claiming to be the disclosure source.

Any complaint or disclosure received that belongs in another channel is forwarded appropriately. IGs notify complainants, except anonymous complainants, when a different agency is the primary office of responsibility (OPR) for their complaint.

Remember, the success of the program lies with each individual within the Air Force. Support by both military and civilian personnel is crucial in preventing and eliminating FWA. Without full support from both military and civilian personnel, the

Air Force can't succeed in the fight against FWA. Any individual who is aware of ineffective controls that could lead to resources being wasted or diverted should report the situation to the proper officials.

Other Avenues To Effect Change

Although many avenues exist for Air Force personnel to effect change, one such avenue is the Air Force Innovative Development through Employee Awareness (IDEA) Program.

Air Force IDEA Program

An IDEA is a constructive idea that proposes a method of doing a task better, faster, cheaper, or safer. An individual or a group can submit an IDEA. IDEAs usually come from the individual's own work area, but is not a requirement. An IDEA must show a specific need for improvement and workable solution.

Types of **Eligible** IDEAs:

- Improves service to the Air Force
- Increase output and enhance productivity
- Conserve energy, manpower, materials, time, and space
- Improve product quality
- Safety
- Reduce costs without loss of quality or efficiency
- Confirmatory (After the fact)

Types of **Ineligible** IDEAs:

- Is a complaint
- Not the submitter's own idea
- Posters, slogans, contests
- Duplicates another IDEA
- Base beautification
- Improves Nonappropriated Fund (NAF) activities
- Parking, shorter work hours, gyms, theater, non smoking areas

- Related only to the personal comfort, convenience or desires of the submitter with no benefit to other personnel
- Is vague, incomplete, deals with generalities or opinions, or is nonfactual (is not based on a specific achievement or universally acknowledge fact; has no firm basis in actuality; and represents only conjecture, speculation, supposition, or theory)
- Proposes a study or review be made without offering the necessary, personally researched guideline data
- Proposes a change in housekeeping practices or routine work orders for the maintenance of buildings (including but not limited to such ideas as replacing burned-out light bulbs, washing windows, or painting), ground (including but not limited to trimming hedges, spraying, fertilizing, landscaping, maintaining or installing sidewalks, repainting curbs and crosswalks)

If you have an IDEA for improvement, see your unit IDEA Monitor and complete an AF Form 1000.

Bibliography:

1. AFI 90-301, Inspector General Complaints, Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, May 94. (Base Pubs Library)
2. AFPAM 36-2241, Vol 1, Promotion Fitness Examination Study Guide, Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, Jul 99.
3. Inquiries, Complaints, and FWA Handbook, Randolph AFB TX: HQ AETC/IGQ, Sep 94. (PK CAMs Office)
4. AFI 38-401, The Air Force Innovative Development through Employee Awareness (IDEA) Program, Washington DC, Department of the Air Force, 1 Oct 97.